

TO: Larry D. Voyles, Director

FROM: Jim deVos, Assistant Director
Wildlife Management Division

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TITLE: Consideration of Proposed Commission Orders 2, 5-10, and 26 for 2014–2015 Hunting Season, Commission Orders 11–18 for 2014–2015 and 2015–2016 Hunting Seasons, and Commission Order 23 for the 2014–2015 and 2015–2016 Trapping Seasons.

DESCRIPTION: The Commission will consider and may vote to approve Commission Orders 2 (deer), 5–10 (turkey, javelina, bighorn sheep, buffalo, bear, and mountain lion), and 26 (population management) establishing seasons and season dates, bag and possession limits, permit numbers, and open areas for the 2014–2015 season. The Commission will also consider and may vote to approve Commission Orders 11–18 (tree squirrel, cottontail rabbit, predatory and furbearing mammals, other mammals and birds, pheasant, quail, chukar partridge, and blue grouse) establishing seasons and season dates, bag and possession limits, and open areas for the 2014–2015 and 2015–2016 seasons. Additionally, the Commission will consider and may vote to approve Commission Order 23 (trapping), establishing season dates, legal species, open and closed areas, and bag and possession limits for the 2014–2015 and 2015–2016 seasons. A detailed description of proposals is available for public review at Department offices.

DATE: March 27, 2014

Summary:

The Department is recommending seasons, season dates, bag and possession limits, permit numbers, and open areas for Commission Orders 2 (deer), 5–10 (fall turkey, fall javelina, bighorn sheep, fall buffalo, fall bear, and mountain lion), and 26 (population management seasons) for 2014–2015 according to hunt guidelines approved by the Commission in September 2013. Small game (Commission Orders 11–18; tree squirrel, cottontail rabbit, predatory and furbearing mammals, other mammals and birds, pheasant, quail, chukar partridge, and blue grouse) and trapping (Commission Order 23) seasons are recommended for both 2014–2015 and 2015–2016 in accordance with the hunt guidelines. The current hunt guidelines were approved by the Commission for a 2-year period that extends through spring 2016. Public meetings to discuss harvest prescriptions for the 2014–2015 seasons were held in each Region prior to meeting with the Game Branch. Each Region also hosted an open house prior to the April Commission meeting where final recommendations were available for public review and

discussion. Public participation ranged from 0 to 19 at public meetings where population trends were discussed, although the presentation was made at the Yuma Valley Rod and Gun Club meeting in Yuma where over 100 members were present.

The Commission has provided the Department with direction through the hunt guidelines to offer specific hunting opportunities. Specifically, the Department was to allocate at least 5% of the general deer permits to juniors-only seasons, units with multiple deer hunts will have stratified 7-day seasons, each region will offer a late mule deer season, and Unit 17A has been added to the units managed under alternative mule deer guidelines.

Statewide, white-tailed deer hunting opportunity in December is limited to 5% of the total white-tailed deer permits, although alternative white-tailed deer units (Units 6A, 23, 30B, 31, and 36C) will be structured to harvest up to 30% of the expected take for that unit during December. Units 3A, 3C, 12A, 12B, 13A, 13B, 17A, 45A, 45B, and 45C are managed according to the alternative deer guidelines for mule deer. Archery deer seasons are recommended for season length adjustments or permitting to attain 10–20% of the total deer harvest by archers. Units 3A/3C, 12A, 12B, 13A, and 13B have permitted archery seasons recommended.

Fall turkey hunts are recommended as limited-weapon shotgun-shooting-shot seasons. Juniors-only turkey permits will be recommended as over-the-counter nonpermit tags in specific units. Archery turkey seasons have been adjusted to overlap with corresponding archery deer seasons.

Fall javelina hunts are to be offered during juniors-only seasons to strive for 10% of total tags (both fall and spring) for juniors hunters. Juniors-only seasons should coincide with a juniors-only deer season, and companion population management seasons are recommended to capitalize on juniors deer hunters in the field.

All bear seasons have specific female harvest limits that close a season on the following Wednesday when that number of female bears have been harvested. Each unit that provides a bear hunt will also have an annual female harvest limit. If the annual female harvest limit is met, this will close any open season on the following Wednesday or any subsequent season in that unit during the current calendar year, even if the subsequent season has not yet opened. The annual female harvest limit comprises female bears lethally removed through Department action (e.g., nuisance) and female bears harvested by hunters.

Daylong seasons are recommended to continue for coyote and mountain lion seasons in specific areas and during specific periods as adopted in September 2013, although some adjustments to open units are recommended. Season length and structure differ from guidelines, and if adopted, we will amend guidelines in accordance with Commission action.

Hopi tribal members will be allocated a previously agreed upon small proportion of deer tags in Units 4A, 4B, 5A, and 5B according to the Hopi Trust Land allocation authorized through the hunt guidelines.

COMMISSION ORDER 2 – DEER

The Department is recommending 42,315 general deer permits in 2014, a decrease of 25 permits statewide from 2013. Archery deer are recommended to increase by 50 (decrease of 50 in Units 3A/3C, increase of 100 in Unit 12AW). Muzzleloader permits are recommended at 1,150, a 20-permit increase from 2013. Juniors-only general permits are recommended to increase by 71 to 2,290 and juniors-only muzzleloader permits are recommended to decrease by 2 to 45 permits. CHAMP permits are recommended to remain unchanged at 10. The net change to recommended permits overall is an increase of 114 from 2013 to a grand total of 46,815 permits.

Relatively minor changes to individual unit deer permits are recommended this year. White-tailed deer permits are recommended for an increase of 175 permits, whereas antlered mule deer and any antlered deer permits are recommended for a decrease of 200 statewide. Juniors permits are recommended at 5.5% of general. This recommendation includes a 100-permit increase to the antlerless deer hunt for juniors-only in Unit 12AW (split between a 100-permit late and a 250-permit early antlerless hunt), which is consistent with allowing population growth on the Kaibab described in the hunt guidelines. Unit 12AW has seen 3 consecutive years of over 100 fawns:100 does, and last year the adult deer population grew by an estimated 10% (which is the upper end of guidelines). The projected harvest from the recommended permit level should continue to allow the Kaibab deer population to grow between 5–10% as described in hunt guidelines. December general mule deer hunts are recommended in Units 5A and 5B, 17B, 23, and 27. December any antlered deer muzzleloader seasons are again recommended in Units 35A and 35B and Units 39, 40A, 40B, 41, and 42. The December archery deer and general deer seasons are recommended to begin on December 12, 2014.

The archery deer over-the-counter nonpermit tag seasons in Unit 34A is recommended to include additional season length of December 12–31 for white-tailed deer only because archery harvest in this unit is less than 10% of the total take for this species. Similar to closures enacted by the Commission for archery hunting within ¼ mile of occupied structures in Units 11M, 25M, and 26M, this year the Department recommends a similar closure within communities near Prescott.

A 10-permit CHAMP hunt is again recommended for Unit 12AW during September 12–18, 2014.

Recommendation:

The Department recommends that the Commission **VOTE TO APPROVE COMMISSION ORDER 2 – DEER AS PROPOSED.**

COMMISSION ORDER 5 –TURKEY

The fall limited-weapon shotgun-shooting-shot turkey season is recommended to run October 3–9, 2014 with 5,475 permits, which is an increase of 175 permits from 2013. Increases are recommended in Units 1, 5B South, 6A, 23, and 27, whereas a decrease is recommended in Unit

5A. There are 7 units (Units 1, 4A, 4B, 6A, 12A, 23, and 27) recommended for juniors-only seasons where over-the-counter nonpermit tags will be offered (no change from 2013). These seasons will run concurrently with the permitted turkey season in the unit. The archery fall turkey nonpermit tag season is recommended to run from August 22–September 11, 2014 with no change to open units from 2013.

Recommendation:

The Department recommends that the Commission **VOTE TO APPROVE COMMISSION ORDER 5 – TURKEY AS PROPOSED.**

COMMISSION ORDER 6 – JAVELINA

For fall 2014, the Department again recommends fall juniors-only javelina seasons, with 855 permits, during season dates that coincide with a juniors-only deer season. Units within Region 5 allocate 15% of the annual permits to either an October 10–16 or a November 21–27, 2014 season. Additional units (Units 16A, 17B, 18B, 19A, 19B, 20A, 39, and 41) also offer juniors-only opportunity, with season dates typically overlapping a school holiday.

In accordance with hunt guidelines, the Department is also recommending the juniors-only deer hunters in Units 16A, 28, 29, 30A, 30B, 31, 32, 33, 36A, and 36B be provided with the opportunity to purchase over-the-counter "companion" tags for javelina, which must be authorized within Commission Order 26.

Recommendation:

The Department recommends that the Commission **VOTE TO APPROVE COMMISSION ORDER 6 – JAVELINA AS PROPOSED.**

COMMISSION ORDER 7 – BIGHORN SHEEP

Bighorn sheep permits are recommended at 104, a decrease of 3 from last year. Permit increases are recommended in Units 16A (1 permit), 27 (Lower Blue River Hunt Area, 1 permit), 40A (new hunt, 1 permit), and 43B (1 permit). Another permit was gained through a recombination of hunt areas in Units 42 and 44A. Permit decreases are recommended in Units 15B West (1 permit), 15C North (3 permits) 15D North (stratification eliminated, 3 permits), and 37A (1 permit). Units where recent declines have been detected or suspected, specifically Units 15A, 15B, 15C, 15D, 45A, 45B, and 45C, are surveyed annually or biennially and hunt recommendations are based on these data.

Recommendation:

The Department recommends that the Commission **VOTE TO APPROVE COMMISSION ORDER 7 – BIGHORN SHEEP AS PROPOSED.**

COMMISSION ORDER 8 – BUFFALO

Three separate buffalo hunts are recommended for the Raymond herd in Units 5A and 5B. The first is a single permit for an adult bull during September 26–28, 2014, and the second 2 hunts are for 2 adult cow permits during September 26–28 and November 7–9, 2014. The total recommendation is for 5 permits for the Raymond herd, which is 3 fewer than last year.

A stakeholder meeting was held on February 18, 2014 to discuss hunt management for the House Rock herd in Units 12A, 12B, and 13B. Because the Department has been attempting to entice buffalo to leave the Grand Canyon National Park, the stakeholder group believes that there may be some opportunity to increase hunting pressure during the fall. This group suggested a series of fall, permitted hunts might increase harvest of cow and yearling buffalo if permit levels were relatively low and season length was about 2 weeks. The recommendation presented to the Commission for consideration is consistent with that recommended by the stakeholder group, and consists of 8, 2-week hunts beginning on August 15, 2014. The first 2 hunts are recommended as archery-only seasons to avoid conflicts with archery deer hunts scheduled at the same time, followed by 6 general hunts. Each hunt has 7 permits for cow or yearling buffalo only. Total permits for consideration include 42 general and 14 archery permits. The House Rock Wildlife Area is excluded from the hunt area because if buffalo are located there, the Department would intend to provide this area as an alternate and preferred refugia for buffalo than the Grand Canyon National Park.

Similar hunt structures in the past have resulted in buffalo retreating to Grand Canyon National Park for the duration of the fall hunting period, with a correspondingly low hunting success and low hunter satisfaction. Alternative hunt structures that the Department will discuss with the Commission are a shorter season length (10-day hunts rather than 14-day hunts) and a combination of permitted draw hunts and companion tag hunts.

Recommendation:

The Department recommends that the Commission **VOTE TO APPROVE COMMISSION ORDER 8 – BUFFALO AS PROPOSED.**

COMMISSION ORDER 9 – BEAR

During 2014, fall bear seasons are recommended to occur during August 8–21, from August 22 for up to 38 days, or October 3 through the end of the 2014 calendar year. The season in Units 4A and 5A is recommended to begin on October 31 and run through the end of the calendar year. General seasons may occur during any of these season dates and archery seasons may occur during the 38 day season beginning on August 24, 2012. This structure maintains open seasons

while allowing Regions to manage female harvest and maintain sites to relocate nuisance bears if necessary. The 2014 recommendation is for a cumulative female harvest limit of 102 for general and 21 for archery season, which is an overall increase of 3 female bears from 2013. The recommendation includes a shift to individual general season hunt female harvest limits in Units 1, 2A, 2B, and 2C (late general decrease by 1 to 3, early season increase by 2 to 6).

The annual female harvest limit will again apply to fall seasons. Annual female harvest limits were established in August 2013 for the units with 2014 spring hunts. Those units that have both spring and fall hunts were considered in the spring 2014 hunt formulation. Harvest that applies to annual female harvest limits includes any take by a hunter or Department action that occurs within a calendar year. Implementation of the annual female harvest limit may result in the closure of a hunt before it opens if the annual female harvest limit is reached before the start of a season.

Hunters will need to contact the Department before they go hunting to determine if a specific hunt unit is open, and notification of this need will be plainly identified within the regulations. Compliance with the mandatory physical check for bear remains high.

Recommendation:

The Department recommends that the Commission **VOTE TO APPROVE COMMISSION ORDER 9 – BEAR AS PROPOSED.**

COMMISSION ORDER 10 – MOUNTAIN LION

The Department recommends an open mountain lion season for daylight hours from July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015 in all open units in accordance with the hunt guidelines. Multiple bag limit seasons with daylong shooting hours are recommended for Units 13B South, Units 15B West, 15C, and 15D, Units 16A South and 18B South, Unit 22 South, Unit 28 South, and Unit 37B North. The multiple bag limit within the Aravaipa-Galiuro Hunt Area in Units 31 and 32 is recommended for removal. Similarly, the restricted hunt in the Pusch Ridge Hunt Area in Unit 33 is recommended for removal. In accordance with hunt guidelines and the establishment of minimal occurrence zones for mountain lions, Units 39, 40A, 40B, 41, 42, 43A, 43B, 44A, and 44B are recommended for daylong shooting hours with a bag limit of 3 mountain lions per year. Compliance with the mandatory physical check for harvested mountain lion remains high.

Recommendation:

The Department recommends that the Commission **VOTE TO APPROVE COMMISSION ORDER 10 – MOUNTAIN LION AS PROPOSED.**

COMMISSION ORDER 26 – POPULATION MANAGEMENT SEASONS

Population management seasons are recommended for javelina to be available to juniors-only muzzleloader deer hunters in Unit 16A and juniors-only general season deer hunters in Units 28, 29, 30A, 30B, 31, 32, 33, 36A, and 36B. These permits are popularly known as "companion" tags. Juniors-only javelina population management restricted nonpermit tags are recommended at 575 for general and 25 for muzzleloader juniors-only seasons. These permits will be available only to hunters that successfully draw a deer tag in the coincidental deer hunt.

Recommendation:

The Department recommends that the Commission **VOTE TO APPROVE COMMISSION ORDER 26 – POPULATION MANAGEMENT SEASONS AS PROPOSED.**

COMMISSION ORDER 11 – TREE SQUIRREL

The Department recommends no change to the tree squirrel seasons for 2014–2016, except to increase the possession limit to three times the daily bag consistent with hunt guidelines.

COMMISSION ORDER 12 – COTTONTAIL RABBIT

The Department recommends no change to the cottontail rabbit seasons for 2014–2016, except to increase the possession limit to three times the daily bag consistent with hunt guidelines.

COMMISSION ORDER 13 – PREDATORY AND FUR-BEARING MAMMALS

Consistent with hunt guidelines, the Department recommends daylong seasons for coyote within Units 10, 12A, 12B, 13A, 13B, 17A, 17B, 31, and 32 during the 2014–2015 season. For the 2015–2016 season, the Department recommends daylong seasons within Units 12A, 12B, 13A, 13B, 17A, 17B, 31, and 32. Pronghorn populations in each of these units currently experience fawn recruitment substantially below guidelines. Although deviating from guidelines, the Commission may wish to consider a longer season (December 1 through May 31) and a change from the limited-weapon shotgun-shooting-shot to a general season, which would increase the range at which coyotes could be taken. Because of the concern regarding inadvertent misidentification of a wolf during conditions with poor lighting, the Department does not recommend daylong seasons within Region 1 where Mexican gray wolves currently exist, nor does the Department recommend any daylong seasons within the border area where potential conflicts with border security agents may develop. No other changes to predatory and fur-bearing mammal seasons are recommended.

COMMISSION ORDER 14 – OTHER BIRDS AND MAMMALS

The Department recommends no change to the other birds and mammals seasons for 2014–2016, except to expand the season on jackrabbit within the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge during September 1, 2014 through March 31, 2015 and September 1, 2015 through March 31, 2016.

COMMISSION ORDER 15 – PHEASANT

The Department recommends 3, 7-day limited-weapon shotgun-shooting-shot seasons with 50 permits each for the 2014–2015 seasons. All pheasant hunts in Units 40B are draw hunts. Dates for the individual hunts are adjusted periodically to accommodate local agricultural practices and conditions to maximize hunter success. The juniors-only hunt is recommended with 40 permits. The archery and falconry seasons remain unchanged. Dates for the hunts in 2014 and 2015 are specified in the attached Commission Orders.

COMMISSION ORDER 16 – QUAIL

The Department recommends no change to the quail seasons 2014–2016, except to increase the possession limit to three times the daily bag consistent with hunt guidelines.

COMMISSION ORDER 17 – CHUKAR PARTRIDGE

The Department recommends no change to the chukar partridge seasons for 2014–2016, except to increase the possession limit to three times the daily bag consistent with hunt guidelines.

COMMISSION ORDER 18 – BLUE (DUSKY) GROUSE

The Department recommends no change to the blue grouse seasons for 2014–2016, except to increase the possession limit to three times the daily bag consistent with hunt guidelines.

Recommendation:

The Department recommends that the Commission **VOTE TO APPROVE COMMISSION ORDERS 11–18 AS PROPOSED.**

COMMISSION ORDER 23 – TRAPPING

The Department recommends no change to the trapping seasons for 2014–2016.

The Department recommends that the Commission **VOTE TO APPROVE COMMISSION ORDER 23 AS PROPOSED.**

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Attachments